

# Project Team 5 Meeting

## Online Local Government Budget & Tax System

Thursday, July 17 ✧ 1:30 - 3:30 pm

*Iowa Department of Education (ICN Room)*

*Grimes Building, 2nd Floor ✧ Des Moines, Iowa*

### ICN Connections

Osceola — Southwestern Iowa Community College, Osceola Center

#### Participants

Ron Amosson, *Team Co-Lead*  
Phil Hurst, *Team Co-Lead*  
Mike Albers  
Mary Jo Detrick  
M.J. Dolan  
Melissa Hatchitt  
Sue Hurst (*for Warren Jenkins*)  
Mark Imerman  
Gary Meyer  
Cris Plocher  
Jerry Reid  
Helen Steffan (*for Grant Veeder*)

#### Staff

Amy Campbell  
Ruth Melone

#### **Introduction**

Ron Amosson welcomed team members to the meeting, and asked for everyone to introduce themselves. The new co-chair, Phil Hurst, was introduced. Hurst help round-out the direction of this project by providing a local government perspective vital to the project.

#### **Review and Discuss Project Plan**

Amosson stressed that he wanted an open discussion with input from all project team members. Amosson reviewed the Project Plan.

- The project will initially focus on the local budget submissions, with valuations to follow.
- The first step — reviewing the current budget reporting process — has been completed.
- The second step — conceptually redesigning the process — is being completed.

- The third step — contacting vendors and consultants to design software to help in this process — is currently being done, and local official input is requested during this process.
- The Department of Management will hire a consultant soon to help put together the local budget package.
- Standards are a big issue before the project can go out for bid.
- A consultant will be hired to help design the Web page. An RFP should be done by mid-August, bids will be received by the end of September, and a contractor should be hired in October.
- The project will track how much redundant data entry has been eliminated.
- Electronic forms will look just like the paper forms.
- Audit routines will be built into the system, so that local governments will know immediately if there is an error in the budget or if they have exceeded the statutory rates.
- The Team will talk to Iowa Newspaper Association to see if budget information can be disseminated and transferred electronically (for public meeting notices).
- Audit routines will show if rates exceed the statutory rates.
- Local governments will be able to easily run scenarios (what ifs), to determine if a certain item they're considering is feasible.
- Electronic forms will carry numbers through automatically to their appropriate places, instead of requiring the local government to enter information repeatedly and manually.
- The built-in error-catching audit routine will allow the department a shorter turn-around time to send back certified tax rates, and facilitate faster all-around processing.
- This system will allow for information to be submitted on paper, on diskette, or through an electronic transfer.

The Team discussed the details of the project, and the Team's role in developing and assessing the project's progress.

- What about cities that don't have access to computers?  
*The Team would like to look at the possibility of partnering with associations and counties to provide opportunities for computers to be available to communities without them. This will include working with Iowa's Councils of Governments (COGs), the County Auditors Association, and other communities. This may suggest the need for an inventory of where such assistance may be available. In addition, the*

*Department of Management will continue to accept paper budgets and budgets on diskette, in addition to the electronic submissions. Electronic submissions will be kept voluntary — but the benefits will be clear.*

- How will incompatibility between counties and the state be resolved? Are we looking at a big expenditure at the local level to make the information from the local level work for the state? Will this be an “unfunded mandate?”  
*There should be no extra cost to the user, because the system should be constructed to be interoperable with a wide variety of systems. Over 2/3 of the school budgets are now submitted on diskette. The system should support any program used in a Windows 3.1 or later operating environment. Amosson stated that he wants this to be as user-friendly as possible for the cities, counties, and schools. The Team should try and do this in a way that eliminates any unfunded mandates. The goal is a paperless system, understanding that it will take some time.*

Amosson commented that the end result is to provide local governments and the public with access to budget and tax information. The Department of Management intends make all budget and tax information on their database available on the Web.

- The Team suggested that the DOM look at placing actual budgets on the web, as well as planned budgets.
- The Team also suggested that the DOM look at links to cities and counties for an explanation of the budget (i.e. taxes per capita may be high for a reason, local governments may want to offer an online statement that explains the situation).

## **Review and Discuss Project Budget**

The project budget is \$193,000 — the bulk of this amount will be spent on consultants. Funding is also available for hardware to manage the database, and software for the budget package. more detailed budget will be available after a consultants in hired.

- Is there a training component in the budget?  
*The Team suggested working through associations like the COGs, League of Cities, Iowa Association of School Boards, and ISAC for training. There is \$8,000 in miscellaneous expenditures set aside, which may cover initial training materials.*

Amosson noted that the Iowa Department of Education is completing a survey of hardware and software used in Iowa’s school districts, and has had a 100% response rate. ISAC is also doing a survey regarding hardware and software in counties, and they have agreed to allow the Project to add a few specific questions. This information will be used to determine use patterns. Amy Campbell noted that lowAccess has been working with associations to make presentations and test applications at meetings and conferences.

## **Review and Discuss Project Work Plan**

Amosson discussed the broad timeline, and noted that he will work on completing the work plan in the coming week. *It will be sent out to the team as soon as it is completed.*

## **General Discussion**

Amosson asked team members for any more input. Mary Jo Detrick stated that the bulk of her comments would come once the software is ready to be tested. Amosson noted that John Muller, of the Legislative Fiscal Bureau has been added to the Team.

Gary Meyer asked team members to think about potential incentives to get people to use the electronic system. The Team agreed that the simplicity and efficiency of the system will be an incentive alone. It was also noted that it may take some work to sell this process to auditors and supervisors, but that it is an educational process.

- Auditors need to be engaged throughout, particularly in the testing of the system, in order to give them ownership and provide incentives for using the system.
- This new process will be sold based on its merits — it will be a huge time savings for both local governments and the state. However, it is critical that the Team build in appropriate supports and training opportunities for local governments, so that they don't feel that this is being pushed on them.
- Opportunity to provide trainings through ISAC, COGs, and the Municipal Clerks Association.

### **Next Meeting**

Campbell requested that each person fill out the yellow card in their packets, so staff can send out information in the best way possible for each team member.

The next meeting has been tentatively scheduled for September 16, 1:30 pm - 3:30 pm. Amosson asked that team members review the project plans and budget, and forward any comments or suggestions to Amy Campbell at 515/1243-2000 (fax: 515/243-5941).

Amosson thanked all the team members for attending and participating, and adjourned the meeting at 3:10.